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CONSTITUTIONS

OF THE

Community of the Sisters of Mary

OF

ST. LOUIS, MO.



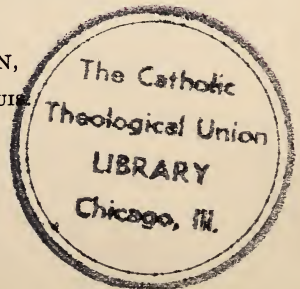
WITH THE APPROVAL OF HIS GRACE

THE MOST REVEREND

JOHN J. GLENNON,

ARCHBISHOP OF ST. LOUIS

1905



First Part.

The Community of the Sisters of Mary in General.

RECEPTION AND MANNER OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

Object of the Community.

1. The primary and general object of the Community is to sanctify the members by the observance of the three vows—poverty, chastity, obedience—and the faithful compliance with the Constitutions.
2. The secondary and special object is to nurse the sick, especially the poor.

CHAPTER II.

The Rule and Constitution.

3. The Sisters of Mary follow the rule of the third order of St. Francis, as prescribed by Pope Leo X. (Jan. 20, 1521) for the tertiaries living in community, with such changes and additions as became necessary by the special object of the community and the circumstances of time.
4. The rule with the changes and additions is given in the following constitutions, duly approved by ecclesiastical authority.

CHAPTER III.

Requisites for Reception into the Community.

5. Young ladies desiring to become members of the community must apply to the Reverend Mother, who alone decides whether they shall be received.

6. It is not sufficient that the applicants are convinced of their vocation to a religious life in general, but they must be certain also of their calling to nurse the sick.

7. They must have led a pure and industrious life, and must have evidenced signs of true piety, concerning which they must present a testimonial from their pastor or spiritual superior.

8. They must be of a cheerful disposition and in good health, so that they can become well fitted to discharge the duties of their future calling.

9. They must present the record of their Baptism and Confirmation together with the testimonial mentioned in No. 7.

10. They must not be less than fifteen and not more than thirty years of age.

11. The following shall not be admitted:

- 1) those who have taken vows in any other community;
- 2) illegitimate children;
- 3) widows.

For weighty reasons, however, the ecclesiastical superior may make an exception in the last two cases.

12. It is expressly declared herewith, that the profession of any sister is null and void, who at the time of her reception made false statements or concealed the truth concerning the above mentioned conditions.

CHAPTER IV.

The Postulate.

13. When a young lady has been received, she shall be numbered among the postulants.

14. From this time forward she shall wear a black dress and a black hood.

15. When possible, the postulate shall be in the house of the novitiate.

16. The time of the postulate shall not be less than six and not more than twelve months. For special reasons the Reverend Mother may make an extension of three months.

CHAPTER V.

The Novitiate.

17. Having successfully passed the period of probation, the postulant may be received into the novitiate. It belongs to the Council-Chapter, and particularly to the Reverend Mother and the Mistress of Novices, to decide whether the candidate shall be received.

18. About four weeks before the next reception the Mistress of Novices will request the candidates who have been deemed worthy, to ask the Rev. Mother for the sister's habit.

19. The Bishop is notified, so that he may proceed with the canonical examination.

20. If the result of the examination is favorable, the postulants will receive the habit of the order on the day designated, and are thereby admitted to the novitiate.

21. The dress of the community is made of black woolen goods, with a cape extending over the arms; the sisters also wear a white collar, a white head covering with a close black veil, a red girdle, a rosary and a small crucifix. In their walks outside of the house they wear a veil over the face, and in winter a very plain black cloak.

22. The reception is always preceded by spiritual exercises of at least 4—5 days.

23. The candidates are invested according to the ceremonial of the community approved by the Bishop.

24. On this occasion the candidates receive the title "sister" and are given a new name.

25. The novitiate shall last two years. Of this time the novices must spend one full year without interruption in the house of the novitiate, and not do any work not in full accord with the spirit and aim of the novitiate.

26. During the time of the novitiate the novices shall be exclusively under the direction of the Mistress of Novices and her substitute.

27. Except in the chapel and in the refectory the novices shall be entirely separated from the professed sisters.

28. They shall be thoroughly instructed in all that pertains to the spiritual life in general and to the community in particular.

29. On the day of reception each novice shall receive a copy of these constitutions to become well acquainted and familiar with them.

CHAPTER VI.

Taking of Vows.

30. The time of the novitiate having expired, the novice may be permitted to make her profession, that is, to take the vows.

31. Admission to profession is dependent upon the judgment and decision of the Council-Chapter.

32. The permission of the Bishop is also necessary. The Bishop or a delegate appointed by him will make the canonical examination.

33. The vows are first taken for two years only.

34. At the end of the two years they may be renewed for three years, subject to the decision of the Council-Chapter.

35. At the expiration of this term, the sisters who have endeavored to live faithfully according to their vows may be admitted to the perpetual vows.

36. Admission to these vows depends entirely upon the decision of the superiors.

37. If any sister is not considered worthy, she must be dismissed at once; unless for a special reason the superiors should grant an extension of the time of probation. This extension must not be for more than one year.

38. The vows are taken according to the following form:

“I, Sister Mary, vow and promise
 “to God the Almighty, to the Blessed Virgin
 “and Mother of God Mary, to the holy Father
 “St. Francis, to live during the next two
 “years (or three years, or during my whole
 “life) in poverty, in obedience and in chas-
 “tity, according to the rule given by Pope
 “Leo X. to the Tertiaries of St. Francis
 “living in community, and according to the
 “regulations of our community of the Sisters
 “of Mary.”

39. At the profession the sisters receive a golden ring and a larger pectoral cross.

CHAPTER VII.

The Vow and Virtue of Poverty.

40. In virtue of the vow of poverty the sisters renounce all right to dispose of temporal property or goods without permission from the superior.

41. Before taking the first vows they should transfer the management of their possessions to some person of their choice, if they do not prefer to entrust same to the superiors of the community.

42. They should not be satisfied with the fulfillment of the letter of the vow, but should strive to become true daughters of St. Francis, and love and practice the virtue of poverty.

43. They should therefore subdue all desire to possess earthly goods, and not allow their hearts to become attached to the vain things of the world.

44. The sisters should humbly ask the Mother for whatever they may require for their use.

45. They are not permitted to ask for, or to accept presents, without permission from the superior, much less are they allowed to give presents. Any present freely given them must be turned over to the Mother at once.

46. Things given them for their use must not be loaned or exchanged without the permission of the superior.

47. No sister is allowed to appropriate, store away or conceal money or edibles, much less should she receive same from others for the sake of keeping or hiding.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Vow and Virtue of Chastity.

48. By the vow of chastity the sisters oblige themselves to remain unmarried, and further to abstain from everything that is in violation of the virtue of chastity.

49. They should, therefore, remember well that every violation of chastity is for them a twofold sin, a sin against the virtue and against the vow of chastity.

50. To protect this most beautiful virtue, they should be most solicitous, and especially when in presence of persons of the opposite sex, they should

observe moderation and recollection in look and bearing, and guard strictly the senses.

CHAPTER IX.

The Vow and Virtue of Obedience.

51. Obedience consists in the voluntary subjection of our will to the will of proper authority.

52. Through the vow of obedience the sisters bind themselves to carry out faithfully the commands of the superiors, that are in accordance with the constitutions and are given in virtue of holy obedience.

53. That they may practise the virtue of obedience more perfectly, the sisters should consider that the superiors take the place of God. They should, therefore, be obedient for the sake of God.

54. The same motives and the same intention should urge them to be solicitous to comply with all the rules and regulations of the constitution.

55. That the acts of obedience may be pleasing to God and meritorious, the sisters should perform them with promptness, readiness and exactness, without murmur and criticism.

CHAPTER X.

Confession and Communion.

56. The sisters shall confess regularly once a week to the appointed priest.

57. Three or four times during the year they shall have an opportunity to go to an extraordinary confessor.

58. If for weighty reasons which need not be made known, any sister asks for a different confessor on other occasions, the superior must provide the opportunity. This should be observed especially when the sister is ill.

59. Communion.—As a rule, the sisters shall communicate four times a week, namely, on the day after confession, on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, unless intervening Feast-days make another order desirable. Each sister receives Communion on her names-day.

60. Novices receive Holy Communion three times a week.

61. Permission for more frequent Communion rests solely with the confessors.

62. If the confessor permits a sister to communicate more frequently for any length of time, the superior must be notified.

63. Only under one condition can the Mother superior forbid a sister to receive Holy Communion: if the sister in question has been guilty of a grievous, external offence since her last confession, and has given scandal,—this prohibition is effective until the guilty party has again confessed.

CHAPTER XI.

Other Exercises of Devotion.

64. *Meditation.* During one half hour the sisters shall meditate every morning upon some proposed subject.

65. *Spiritual Reading.* At the principal meals a pious, instructive and edifying book shall be read.

66. *Examination of Conscience.* At a fixed time during the day the sisters shall make a particular examen, and in the evening, in connection with night prayers, they shall make a general examination of conscience for the day.

67. *Holy Mass.* Every morning the sisters shall assist devoutly at holy Mass.

68. *Morning and Evening Prayers* shall be said in common in the chapel.

69. *Office.* As a rule the sisters shall assemble in choir and recite of the Little Office of the Blessed Visgin "Prime" in the morning, and "Vespers and Compline" in the afternoon. If possible, they should recite the whole Office on Sundays and the principal Feast-days.

70. *Rosary.* Each sister shall daily recite privately one third part of the Rosary.

71. *Way of the Cross.* Those who have the time should daily repair to the chapel to make the Way of the Cross. This devout practice is entirely voluntary.

72. *Private Devotions.* As far as time will permit, the sisters are at liberty to choose other private devotions, but they should not overburden themselves, for too many devotions suppress rather than advance the spirit of true piety.

73. *Last Friday.* On the last Friday of each

month the sisters shall subject themselves to a rigid self-examination and meditate upon the last things, especially upon death, and spend the day as much as possible in interior recollection and silence.

74. Only for a most urgent cause shall the superior make an exception in the common exercises.

75. *Fast and Abstinence.* Concerning these the sisters shall follow the rules and regulations of the diocese.

76. Those who are continually engaged in nursing the sick, or in the performance of other hard work, are, as a rule, excused from fasting.

77. In case of doubt the confessor should be consulted.

CHAPTER XII.

Means to protect and advance the Religious Spirit.

78. *Cloister.* The rooms occupied by the sisters are cloistered. No one else is allowed to enter.

79. The sister appointed as nurse, the priest and the physician alone have admission to the room of the sick person. If the sister is dangerously ill, the parents, brothers and sisters may also be admitted.

80. *Visits.* Sisters are allowed to pay visits only with the consent of the Mother superior, and then they must remain in the reception room of the house visited, and should be accompanied by another sister unless they have a special permission.

81. The time of recreation excepted, the sisters should constantly be engaged in some work. They

should be attentive to their own and not be concerned with the work of others, and, therefore, they should not enter or remain in the working rooms of others without necessity.

82. *Walks.* Without special permission the sisters shall not walk out alone, but be accompanied by another.

83. *Letters.* The sisters shall not correspond with externs without permission. All letters written with the consent of the superior as well as all letters received are subject to the inspection of the superior, excepting the letters written to the spiritual superiors and those received from them.

84. *Silence.* This should be strictly observed from the time the signal is given in the evening until after breakfast the following morning.

85. During the remainder of the day, except at recreation, the sisters should endeavor not to speak more than is necessary.

86. Speaking is always forbidden in the chapel, dormitory and refectory, unless the last named be used also as a community room. In the halls and corridors whatever is necessary should be said in a subdued tone.

87. Once a week the so-called "Culpa" is held under the direction of the Superior, where the sisters publicly accuse themselves of the external transgressions of the constitution committed during the week, and are given a proportionate penance.

CHAPTER XIII.

Recreation.

88. A certain time of each day is set aside for recreation and should serve:

1) to refreshen body and spirit, fitting them to be more serviceable for God.

2) to strengthen the bonds of love and unity among the sisters.

89. Unless exempt by special dispensation, all the sisters must take part in the general recreation, and all should contribute to the amusement and entertainment. To remain quiet and morose would be against sisterly love.

90. During recreation sisters should be on their guard against:

1) being too boisterous;

2) indulging in too much worldly conversation;

3) offending charity;

4) making remarks that might hurt the feelings of another sister.

CHAPTER XIV.

Sisterly Charity.

91. The Sisters of Mary should be permeated with the spirit of true neighborly love, which is founded on the love of God and which tends to the mutual perfection of the members.

92. Care must be taken that this love does not develop into particular friendships, for these just as

much as a special aversion against certain sisters, are an obstacle to the spiritual life of a religious community.

93. Each sister should be ever watchful, that in her work and conduct she in no way offend or scandalize her co-workers, injuring their spiritual welfare and perhaps endangering their vocation.

94. To avoid any violation of charity so dear to God, the sisters should study and imitate the meekness and humility of the Divine Heart, and in accordance with their exalted calling always meet one another lovingly and respectfully.

95. The younger sisters should honor and respect the older as such; and these bear patiently and generously the weaknesses of the younger.

96. A grievous offence must be reported at once, especially if public scandal is given. The sister whose fault is reported must stifle any bitterness that may arise, and thank the sister who made the report, humbly ask pardon of those who were scandalized, and beg the Mother Superior for a suitable penance.

CHAPTER XV.

Nursing the Sick.

97. The sisters should earnestly endeavor to acquire all the knowledge necessary and useful for successfully nursing the sick.

98. They should nurse the sick from motives of pure love of God, with meekness, love, patience and self-sacrifice, rendering their service in every thing not against propriety.

99. They should scrupulously follow the directions of the physician and promptly carry out all his regulations.

100. They should be diligent in praying for their patients, and, when timely, pray with them, admonishing them to have confidence in God. If Catholics, the patients should be reminded of the reception of the Sacraments as soon as danger approaches.

101. Whilst nursing in private houses, the sisters must be circumspect and careful and conduct themselves in an edifying manner.

102. They should be especially guarded in their conversation and not speak of conditions existing in the community, of their own former life, and, above all, not say anything about families where they have been engaged.

103. When nursing privately they should not forget to say devoutly the prayers that are of obligation. During spare moments they should occupy themselves with such handiwork as they have brought with them from the community house.

104. Gifts or presents offered them during the time of nursing may be accepted for the community, but not for themselves.

CHAPTER XVI.

Care of Sick Sisters.

105. When a sister becomes ill, she is taken to a special sick room as soon as necessary, and one of the sisters is appointed her nurse.

106. The sick sister must give full obedience to her nurse, and must follow strictly the directions of the physician.

107. Without the permission of the nurse she must not leave the sick room.

108. The other sisters are not allowed to enter the sick room without the knowledge of the Rev. Mother and the nurse. The superiors should frequently visit the sick, show their loving sympathy, and endeavor to encourage and console.

109. When the sickness becomes dangerous, provision should be made for the timely reception of the Sacraments, and it should also be arranged that the confessor or some other priest assist the dying sister in her last moments.

CHAPTER XVII.

Care for the Sisters Departed.

110. Upon the death of a sister arrangements should be made for a plain and simple funeral. She is buried in the dress of the community, and everything should harmonize well with holy poverty.

111. The death of a sister must be reported at once to the mother-house. Notices must also be sent to all the other houses of the community.

112. In the mother-house and the house in which the sister died, the Office of the Dead, or five Our Fathers should be said as soon as possible.

113. During three days the sisters should offer all their good works for the one departed.

114. In addition to the Mass of Burial, Masses

shall be said for the repose of her soul on the 3rd, 7th, 30th and two other days.

115. In the mother-house Mass is offered once a month for all the departed sisters, and once a month the sisters receive Holy Communion for the same intention.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Dismissal from the Community.

116. If it becomes evident after repeated trials and admonitions, that a novice has no vocation, she can and must be dismissed.

117. For the dismissal of a sister with temporary vows it requires weighty reasons, which must be considered such by a majority of the Council Sisters.

118. The cause must be most weighty and urgent, and there must be absent all hope for reform, before a sister with perpetual vows is dismissed. The decision rests with the Council Sisters voting by secret ballot.

119. Through continual admonitions and trials it must have become evident that a change in the life of the guilty sister cannot well be expected, and that her continuation in the order would be very detrimental to the community.

120. For the dismissal of a sister with vows the consent of the Bishop is necessary. He is petitioned at the same time by the superiors, or the sister under trial, to grant dispensation from the vows.

121. A sister once dismissed cannot be re-admitted into the community.

Second Part.

Direction and Organization of the Community.

CHAPTER I.

§ 1. *The Supreme Direction.*

122. The supreme direction of the entire community is vested in the superior-general, who has the title "Reverend Mother", assisted by the council chapter, and on extraordinary occasions by the general chapter.

§ 2. *The Council of Rev. Mother.*

123. The following are members of the Council:

- 1) the four assistants elected by the general chapter;
- 2) the Mistress of Novices, elected by the Rev. Mother and her assistants;
- 3) two sisters elected by the above mentioned.

§ 3. *The General Chapter.*

124. The following are members of the general chapter:

- 1) the Rev. Mother;
- 2) the Council-Sisters;
- 3) the Superiors of affiliated houses;

4) two delegates from the Mother House, chosen by all the sisters of that house having perpetual vows;

5) one delegate from each affiliated house in which there are at least five sisters with perpetual vows.

125. Excepting the Mistress of Novices and the Superiors of affiliated houses, no sister without perpetual vows is eligible for the council or general chapter.

§ 4. *Election of the Superior General.*

126. The superior general is elected for a term of five years by the members of the general chapter.

127. Two months before the expiration of her term the superior general shall send notice of the coming election to those entitled to vote, stating distinctly the time and place of the election.

128. A similar notice must be sent to the Bishop of the diocese, who, either in person or through a delegate, will preside over the election, assisted by two priests.

129. At the same time the devout prayers of all the sisters are earnestly requested for a happy election.

130. The election is by secret ballot. It is understood that no one can vote for herself.

131. For an election there must be an absolute majority, that is, one vote more than half of all the votes cast.

132. If after three ballots there is no majority, the votes must be cast for the two sisters who received the largest number of votes on the third ballot.

133. If there is no majority after two further ballots, the Bishop or his delegate will decide the election.

§ 5. *The Election of the Assistants.*

134. Immediately upon the election of the superior general the chapter elects the assistants, observing the same mode of procedure as in the election of the Rev. Mother.

135. The four assistants are elected in rotation, and each by a special ballot, the result of which is at once made known by the presiding officer.

136. Sisters entitled to vote, but prevented from attending in person on account of sickness or another valid reason, should place their vote in a sealed envelope and send same in time, so that it will be in the hands of the Bishop or his delegate not later than the morning of the day of the election. The Bishop or the delegate will then cast the vote.

137. Officers may be reelected. If they fail of reelection they return to the rank of the ordinary sisters. The out-going superior general, however, retains the title "Mother", whilst the newly elected superior exclusively bears the title "Reverend Mother".

138. After the election a written document as to the result should be prepared and signed by

the presiding officers. The ballots are burned whilst the chapter is still assembled.

139. The out-going officers continue to be members of the chapter during the entire session, even though new officers were chosen in their place.

CHAPTER II.

Rights and Duties of the Superior General.

140. The Superior General has the control and direction of the whole community and the individual houses.

141. She should lead all by her good example and govern with love, care and prudence.

142. She should watch diligently that the rule and constitution are faithfully observed, and not tolerate any neglect or abuse to be introduced.

143. She should see to it especially that all the religious exercises are performed promptly, and that all the officers are faithful in their duties.

144. At least once a year, in person or through a delegate, she should visit all affiliated houses, to investigate whether the constitution is observed, and whether the sisters are faithful in their work. On this occasion she should look into the financial condition of these houses and examine their books of record.

145. The superior general cannot grant a general dispensation from any rule of the constitution. For grave reasons she can declare an exception for one or all the sisters, but this for a short period only.

146. That there may be no interference with the general direction, the superior general should not at the same time be the superior of any individual house.

CHAPTER III.

The Substitute of the Mother.

147. The superior general shall choose one of the four assistants not otherwise overburdened with work to act as her substitute. The substitute should not be the superior of any house or hospital.

148. When the superior general is absent or otherwise impeded, she shall act in her place.

149. At the same time she should be a confidant for the community and a mediator with the Rev. Mother.

150. If the office of superior general becomes vacant by death or through resignation, the substitute shall send notice of a new election, and until such has taken place she shall fill her office.

CHAPTER IV.

The Council of the Mother.

151. Besides the instances alluded to in the foregoing, the council decides in the following cases:

- 1) the erection of new affiliated houses;
- 2) the closing of already existing houses;
- 3) the dismissal of sisters with temporary or perpetual vows;
- 4) the removal from office of the Mistress of Novices or a council-sister.

- 5) New election in case of death or dismissal of a council-sister;
- 6) the erection of important new buildings;
- 7) the contracting of considerable debt;
- 8) other matters of great importance for the community.

152. These matters are decided by vote. In case of a tie the Rev. Mother decides.

153. The chapter shall meet regularly once a month. An extraordinary meeting may be called at any time when matters of importance are to be decided.

154. The meeting of the council shall be opened with prayer.

155. The secretary shall keep the minutes of each meeting and shall affix her signature to same.

156. The council - sisters must observe the strictest silence concerning everything discussed and decided in the chapter meeting, and also keep secret whatever is confided to them as councilors.

CHAPTER V.

The Mistress of Novices.

157. The Mistress of Novices has the exclusive direction of postulants and novices, over whom she has the same authority as the Rev. Mother has over the whole community.

158. She must instruct her subjects in the duties of the spiritual life in general, and in the special duties of the members of the community of the

Sisters of Mary. She should lead them to the faithful fulfillment of these duties by word and example.

159. She should devote all her time to this office, and, therefore, should have no other office in the community.

160. When necessary or useful, she may be given an assistant or a substitute.

161. From time to time and in particular cases she shall give an accurate report to the Mother Superior as to the conduct of her subordinates.

CHAPTER VI.

The Secretary General.

162. The Secretary General keeps the chronicle of the community and shall enter therein all events pertaining to same.

163. She shall keep an accurate register of all novices and professed sisters, and also a list of the departed sisters of the community.

164. She shall keep a full account of all receptions, the vows, the renewal of vows, the taking of perpetual vows, and of the sisters who have left or who have been dismissed from the community.

165. Until further arrangement she shall also have charge of the treasury, and must therefore keep an account of the receipts and expenses of the mother-house, must attend to the book-keeping and financial statements.

166. Every three months she shall give a report of all receipts and expenses and the condition

of the treasury to the Mother Superior, and at the end of the year submit a condensed general report.

167. She also has charge of the archives of the community, and must, therefore, take care that all the original documents and official correspondences pertaining to the community are properly entered, ordered and preserved.

168. She must attend to all official correspondence, unless this is done directly by the Mother.

CHAPTER VII.

Local Superiors.

169. The superiors of affiliated houses are appointed for a term of three years by the Rev. Mother with the consent of the council-sisters. At the expiration of the term she may be reappointed.

170. Local superiors cannot be removed from office or transferred during the term except for a weighty reason, which shall be judged and decided by a majority vote of the council-sisters.

171. The Rev. Mother appoints one or two sisters to assist the local superior in the direction and management of affiliated houses.

172. The local superiors should be conscientious about the observance of the rule and constitution, and lovingly provide for the spiritual and temporal wants of their subordinates.

173. They have full charge of the temporal affairs of their houses, of the money and business transactions, of which they should keep a strict account.

174. Every three months they should give an accurate and full report to the Mother Superior.

175. Once a month, or whenever things of importance are to be considered, they should consult with their assistants about the condition and welfare of the houses.

176. The local superiors should carefully follow the orders and wishes of the Rev. Mother, and consult her in all doubts and difficulties.

177. Since the local superiors take the place of the Rev. Mother, the subordinates should be obedient to them the same as they are to the Mother Superior.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Procurator.

178. It shall be the duty of the procurator to attend:

- 1) to the ordinary buying for the household,
- 2) especially to all that is necessary for the kitchen,
- 3) to the less important repairs of the house,
- 4) to the thorough cleanliness of the whole house and all the parts.

CHAPTER IX.

The Mistress of the Kitchen.

179. It shall be her duty to prepare the food in a manner clean and plain, yet good and nourishing.

She must exercise the utmost care to keep the kitchen, utensils, and dishes clean at all times.

CHAPTER X.

The Sacristan.

180. The Sacristan is the custodian of the sacred vestments and vessels and should always have everything in readiness for Divine Service.

181. She has charge of the perpetual light before the Bl. Sacrament, and should be careful to keep it always burning.

182. She must clean the chapel and ring the bell for Holy Mass, the other services and the Angelus.

CHAPTER XI.

The Portress.

183. The portress has in her keeping the keys of the house, she opens and locks the door, answers all calls to the door, directs visitors to the reception room and announces them to the superior, without informing any one else of their presence.

184. Without the consent and wish of the superiors she shall not carry things from the house, that may have been given her by the sisters or other inmates.

185. She must never allow the door to remain unlocked, and not entrust the keys to others without the consent of the superior.

186. In the evening she gives the keys to the sister appointed for night duty, and receives them from her in the morning.

CHAPTER XII.

Other Officers.

187. The above named and all other officers should accept the position offered them in cheerful obedience, and discharge their duties faithfully, observing the special regulations they may have received.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Obligation of this Constitution.

188. Whilst the rule of the third order of St. Francis and these special constitutions do not of themselves bind in conscience, it would nevertheless be sinful to violate them through contempt or transgress them habitually, from which scandal might come.



Papal Regulation concerning Direction of Souls in Convents.

As in general all things human, no matter how good and holy they may be in themselves, so in particular the best and wisest laws have the disadvantage that they can be misconstrued and abused on the part of man. And thus it happens at times that the end intended by the law-giver is not attained, but the very opposite is effected. Unhappily this is the case with many statutes of many congregations, communities and societies of women with simple or solemn vows, as well as of men who are entirely under the direction of lay brothers. In their constitutions it was permitted them occasionally to receive information of matters pertaining to conscience, for the purpose that the younger members, in walking the road to perfection, might in case of doubt profit by the experience of their superiors. Entirely contrary to this some have introduced the complete revealing of conscience, which, of course, belongs exclusively to the tribunal of Penance. According to the laws of the Church it was also prescribed in the constitutions of these societies, that the members should confess to the ordinary and extraordinary confessor. But in their caprice certain superiors refused to provide an extraordinary confessor for their subjects even then,

when for reasons of conscience these stood in need of such a confessor. Finally, it was entrusted to the wise and prudent judgment of these superiors, to direct their subjects in the performance of works of penance and the practice of devotions. This trust through abuse they so extended, that they permitted the reception of Holy Communion just as they pleased, and at times forbade same entirely.

Thus these salutary and wise regulations, which had been given for the spiritual welfare of the members and for the preservation and advancement of peace and unity in the community, were not seldom twisted and turned that they caused detriment to souls, disquieted consciences, and were frequently destructive of external peace, as is readily evident from the many complaints submitted by the subjects of these societies to the Holy See.

Therefore, our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII., in his special solicitude for this preferred part of his flock, in an audience granted to me, the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, on the 14th of December, 1890, after careful consideration, resolved, determined and ordered, as follows:

1. The Holy Father declares all and each provision of constitutions of pious communities and societies of women with simple and solemn vows, and also of lay brothers, even when this constitution has been approved by the Holy See in whatsoever form, even the so-called most special form, in as far

as they refer to the information of the interior affairs of the heart and conscience, no matter in what manner or under what name, as revoked, invalid, and for the future not binding. He makes it of strict obligation for all superiors of such congregations, communities and societies, to erase entirely and remove completely the aforesaid provision from their constitutions, regulations and hand-books. He also recalls and annuls all such customs and usages, even when of long standing.

2. He further strictly forbids the superiors of every rank and dignity, to endeavor, directly or indirectly, by command, admonition, fear, threat or flattery, to induce their subjects to give such information. He commands the subordinates to report to the higher authority the action of a lower superior, who dares tempt them to this; if such is attempted by the superior general, report must be made to this Sacred Congregation.

3. It is not forbidden that the subjects voluntarily make known their condition to the superiors with the intention of benefitting by their prudence, expecting to receive counsel and direction in acquiring virtue and advancing in perfection.

4. To carry out the regulation concerning the ordinary and extraordinary confessor of societies, prescribed by the Holy Council of Trent, sess. 25, cap. 10, "de regularibus", and ordered by Pope Benedict XIV. in the Constitution "Pastoralis Curae", the Holy Father commands all superiors

not to deny their subjects the opportunity of an extraordinary confessor as often as in conscience they feel the need of one, without inquiring into the reason for the request, and without manifesting any dissatisfaction. That this providential measure may not remain ineffective, the Holy Father admonishes the Bishops to designate certain priests and grant them the necessary faculties in every locality in his diocese where communities of women exist, so that the members can easily find a proper confessor.

5. In reference to permission or prohibition of receiving Holy Communion, the Holy Father orders that such permission or prohibition is subject exclusively to the ordinary or extraordinary confessor, and that the superiors have no right whatever to interfere, except in the case when one of their subjects has given scandal to the community or has been guilty of a grievous external offence since the last confession, when the reception of Holy Communion may be interdicted until the next confession.

6. Therefore all are reminded that they should diligently prepare themselves for Holy Communion and receive it on the days designated in the rule of the community; if in consideration of the ardent desire and the spiritual progress of a member, the confessor deems more frequent Communion advisable, he alone can grant such permission. When any member has obtained the permission of the confessor for frequent or even daily Communion,

the superior must be so informed; if the latter believes to have real and weighty reasons against such frequent Communion, he should impart this knowledge to the confessor, whose decision shall be final.

7. The Holy Father commands all general, provincial and local superiors of these communities, male and female, that the regulation of this decree be zealously and diligently observed, under pain of the punishments imposed upon superiors who act contrary to the commands of the Holy See, which punishments are incurred by the very commission of the deed.

8. Finally, the Holy Father commands that translations of this decree be inserted in the constitutions of the aforesaid communities, and that at least once a year at a specified time in each one of the houses, during the common meal, or else at a meeting called especially for this purpose, the decree be read aloud in a clear and distinct tone.

Thus the Holy Father has ordered and commanded, removing all and each impediment or objection, not excepting those that may be urged in future.

Given at Rome from the Office of the Secretary of said Holy Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, on the 17th of December, 1890.

J. CARDINAL VERGA,
Prefect.

FR. ALOYS, Bishop of Callinico,
Secretary.

CONCLUSION.

When diligent study has made the sisters well versed in the rule and the foregoing constitutions, they should consider well that understanding and knowledge is not the principal object to be sought, but that everything depends on action, for the Lord says: "He that heareth my words and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me!"; that a vow is pleasing and acceptable to God, and efficacious in meriting a higher degree of happiness, only when faithfully kept; for it is said: "It is better not to vow, than not to keep the vow."—

God in his infinite love, without personal merit but through Grace, calls certain persons to a religious state, yet in this state he can and will sanctify only those who honestly endeavor to preserve the grace of vocation by a faithful fulfillment of their duties. Therefore all sisters should perfect themselves in fidelity to duty, and not esteem as of small moment anything prescribed by the commandments of God and the Church, promised in the holy vows, or specified in the rule and constitution. Whatever duty commands and obedience calls for, is not small or insignificant.

It therefore does not depend on the occupation with which the sister is engaged, not on the position

she holds, but on fidelity to duty which urges the best use of her full strength to fill well her position, for the reward of eternal happiness is promised to fidelity in small things. The higher the position, the greater is the responsibility. The words of the apostle apply in all their force to the superiors, that they must render an account to God not only of themselves, but also of their subjects and of the souls entrusted to their care. All the sisters should frequently meditate on these words; the superiors that thereby they may be preserved in humility, and the subjects, that by cheerful obedience they contribute their share, that the account which must be rendered may, in the words of the same apostle, be given with joy and not with grief.

All the sisters have the same end and the same aim in life, to work for the honor of God and the salvation of souls, and thereby to sanctify themselves. Therefore all should lovingly assist one another; one should readily bear with the weaknesses of the other; they should support one another in the progress of virtue by prayer and example.

The devil knows well that the sisters do not will to do evil, and therefore he prefers to tempt them under the appearance of good. They must be alert and on their guard, not to be blinded by the tempter and led to a spirit of independence.

Whoever has received an office, even if the lowest, and whoever has been assigned to a work, even if the most common, should conform strictly

with all the existing regulations, and fear nothing more than self-will, that by and through the fear of God evil may be conquered in good.

The reward of eternal happiness is in proportion to our merit, and therefore every sister should be happy to meet with humiliations and sacrifices, because these are opportunities for merit, and should rejoice to follow the poor, despised, calumniated and abused Jesus on the road of self-denial.

To find renewed courage for cheerful obedience to duty and to have strength to persevere to the end, the sisters should frequently recall the golden words of the holy father ST. FRANCIS: **“We have promised great things,—greater things are promised to us! Let us keep the former,—strive for the latter. Pleasure is short,—the pain is eternal,—the glory is incomprehensible! Many are called,—few are chosen! Each receives reward according to the works.”**



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